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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 000413

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND PRM/A

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [VM](#)  
SUBJECT: CLASHES OVER LAND IN THE MEKONG DELTA

REF: 07 Ho Chi Minh 1056

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Small-scale but violent clashes sparked by unresolved land disputes have reportedly broken out between Khmer ethnic minority people and Government of Vietnam (GVN) military in the Mekong Delta province of An Giang. Local contacts confirm a Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF) report that the GVN military conducted raids in early April into the protestors' villages, leaving several injured. Two ethnic Khmers have reportedly been arrested. A second KKF report of the persecution of another Khmer ethnic minority person in Soc Trang province appears unfounded. End summary.

#### Clashes in An Giang Province

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¶2. (SBU) The KKF - an exile pro-Khmer group based in the U.S. and long considered anti-GVN by Vietnamese government officials - released an April 9 report condemning the Vietnamese government for violently cracking down on peaceful Khmer ethnic protestors in Chau Lang commune, Tri Ton district, An Giang province. According to the KKF, an unknown number of ethnic Khmers gathered on April 7, upset over the GVN's recent destruction of a bridge in the neighborhood. GVN authorities reacted, said KKF, by raiding the protestors' villages on April 8 and targeting two Khmer individuals, Mr. Chau Hen and Mr. Chau Ut. The KKF report went on to state that police arrested Chau Hen but Chau Ut had gone missing, and that at least four of their relatives were injured during the raid.

¶3. (SBU) POL staff confirmed the demonstration and the police raid in An Loi and Ta On villages with a Khmer monk who lives in the area, who said the raid took place early on the morning of April 9 (rather than April 8 as reported by KKF). According to the monk, on the night of April 6, Chau Lang commune police, for unknown reasons, destroyed a bridge leading to rice fields where local farmers go to work. Frustrated, three hundred farmers gathered on April 7 and threw stones at the commune people's committee office. During the retaliatory police raid on April 9, the monk noted, several ethnic Khmers were injured, including Chau Ut's father. The monk confirmed the arrest of both Chau Hen and Chau Ut. According to the monk, most of the injured were denied medical attention. He noted that aside from joining this protest, Chau Hen and Chau Ut are well-known to the GVN for their involvement in prior protests over land issues.

¶4. (SBU) The monk went on to report that on April 10, over 100 Khmer land protestors clashed with about 1,000 GVN soldiers in the villages of An Loi and Ta On. According to the monk, the soldiers beat protestors with sticks, while the protestors were armed with knives. Many Khmers were injured, the monk said, and

again, most were denied medical attention.

15. (SBU) Villagers from An Loi and Ta On told the monk that an unknown number of women were taken away in a police car, and that the villagers were so afraid they moved into the pagoda to sleep. The monk talked with the provincial Executive Council of the government-recognized Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, district authorities, and the police, who assured him that there would be no more arrests. By April 14, most of villagers had been persuaded by the monk to return home.

Arrests in Soc Trang?

16. (SBU) In a second KKF report dated April 2, the KKF accused GVN authorities of burning down the house of a Khmer woman, jailing ethnic Khmers who have been persistent with land complaints, and stealing Khmer crops in Boeng Ansa village, An Huyen commune, My Xuyen district, Soc Trang province. Contacts noted that there are no such villages or communes by these names, even if pronounced in Khmer language. However, a high-ranking dignitary of the provincial executive council of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha from My Xuyen district confirmed that a Khmer woman's house was burned down, but by her younger brother. The brother had allegedly stabbed another person over some dispute, the dignitary said. When police came to arrest the brother, he burned down the house to cover his escape, but was eventually arrested. No other contacts could confirm any further arrests.

Comments

17. (SBU) Post is attempting to gain further information regarding the reasons for the demonstrations in An Giang province, but believes reports identifying land disputes as the cause of the unrest to be accurate. The ethnic Khmer minority in the area have a long history of land disputes (some violent) with both Vietnamese authorities and their Kinh majority

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neighbors. Details of incidents in the Khmer community are hard to obtain due to the isolation of the area and the language barrier (many Khmers do not communicate well in Vietnamese).

18. (SBU) At present, it is unclear if there is any link between the two arrestees and the KKF. However, faced not only with a restive Khmer population, but also with a yet-to-be reconciled portion of the historically militant Hoa Hao Buddhist sect, security forces in An Giang are known to be aggressive and hard-line (reftel), and post is not surprised to hear reports of a heavy-handed police crackdown on Khmer protestors in this region. Post continues to track incoming reports and seek verification of these events, but does not expect to have conclusive information on the details surrounding the demonstrations for some time to come. End comment.  
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